

Pop Art absurdists



ON Tuesday, a large painting by Jasper Johns, the 57-year-old Pop Art absurdist, sold at Christie's, New York, for £2.2 million. This was an auction record for the work of a living artist, according to my friend Geraldine Norman.

I suppose it is the pressure of the great American foundations

which keeps this particular pantomime on the road. They have spent so much money on the same sort of rubbish already that they have to go on buying it or their previous investment in 'modern art' will be seen to be worthless.

But then I read of an enterprising Austrian who has offered Mick Jagger a vast sum

of money for his ashes, hoping to sell them eventually in hour-glasses for many hundreds of thousands of pounds each. A spokesman for Jagger was quoted as saying 'It's going to be a heavy thing for Mick to figure out and give an answer.' Even if it is in death, what's he going to value more - his body or his money?

Few of us, I imagine, would be prepared to pay 50p for the whole collection of Rolling Bones. But the fact that money is available for this sort of nonsense might make us revise Marx's theory of Surplus Value. Technological capitalism produces so much more wealth than there are useful things to spend it on that we have to spend it on rubbish.

The Sunday Telegraph (BrE)

Sentence structure

A Three of these sentences contain an extra word, or extra words, not in the text. Cross out the extra words where necessary, and say why you have done so. Then check against the text.

1 On Tuesday, a large painting by Jasper Johns, he is the 57-year-old Pop Art absurdist, sold at Christie's. (ll. 1-5)

2 I suppose it is the pressure of the great American foundations which it keeps this particular pantomime on the road. (ll. 10-13)

3 Even if it is in death, what's he going to value more - his body or his money? (ll. 31-33)

4 But the fact that money is available for this sort of nonsense might make us to revise Marx's theory of Surplus Value. (ll. 37-40)

B Join these sentences using the suggestions in brackets and making any necessary changes. Then check against the text.

1 They have spent money on the same sort of rubbish already. They have to go on buying it. Their previous investment in 'modern art' will be seen to be worthless. (ll. 13-19) [*so much, that, or*]

2 But then I read of an enterprising Austrian. He has offered Mick Jagger a vast sum of money for his ashes. He is hoping to sell them eventually in hour-glasses for many hundreds of thousands of pounds each. (ll. 20-26) [*who, -ing*]

Grammar points

C Comment on the form of the verbs.

- a Jasper Johns **sold** a large painting for £2.2 million.
- b A large painting by Jasper Johns **was sold** for £2.2 million.
- c A large painting by Jasper Johns **sold** for £2.2 million. (ll. 1–6)

Rewrite these sentences a) in the passive b) with an active verb that has a passive meaning.

- 1 They *have sold* some of Van Gogh's paintings for millions of dollars.
Some of Van Gogh's paintings have been sold/have sold for millions of dollars.
- 2 They're already reprinting his book.
- 3 You *can wash* this new material at high temperatures.
- 4 How much *do you let* this flat *for* during the summer months?

D Why can't you use *alive* in sentence a?

- a *This was an auction record for the work of a **living** artist.* (ll. 6–8)
- b *This was an auction record for the work of an artist who's still **alive**.*

Complete these sentences using adjectives beginning with a-.

- 1 The *frightened* people ran out of the building. They all looked terribly *afraid*.
- 2 We looked at the *floating* vessel. We were glad to know it was still
- 3 I could never touch a *live* lobster. I could never touch a lobster that is still
- 4 The *burning* forest glowed in the darkness. The forest was for days.
- 5 I never feel *lonely* when I am

E Read a–d, then make up rules for the use of *according to*, *in (my) opinion* and *by*.

- a ***According to Geraldine/In Geraldine's opinion**, this is a record.* (Not *by Geraldine*) (ll. 6–9)
- b ***According to** the weather forecast it'll be wet tomorrow.* (Not *by the weather forecast*)
- c ***In my opinion**, Geraldine may very well be right.* (Not *by me/according to me*)
- d ***By/According to** my watch, the time is exactly 8.27.*

Supply *according to*, *in ... opinion* or *by*. Sometimes more than one answer is possible.

- 1 I know what my verdict would be. *In my opinion* the man's innocent.
- 2 He's such a fusspot. He does everything exactly the book.
- 3 her, it's all right to eat fruit that hasn't been washed first.
- 4 an announcement I've just heard, the next train's been cancelled.
- 5 my solicitor, they haven't got a case.

F Why do we use *much* in a and *many* in b?

- a *Technological capitalism produces **much more** wealth than ...* (ll. 41–43)
- b *Technological capitalism produces **many more** goods than we need.*

Supply *much* or *many*. Suggest other words in place of *much/many* that will fit in these spaces.

- 1 Have you had enough to eat? – Yes, thank you. I can't eat *much/any* more.
- 2 That's just about all I know. I wasn't able to get more information than that.
- 3 more people are in favour of heavy penalties for drunken drivers than you think.
- 4 I wish you'd stop that noise! I really can't take more.